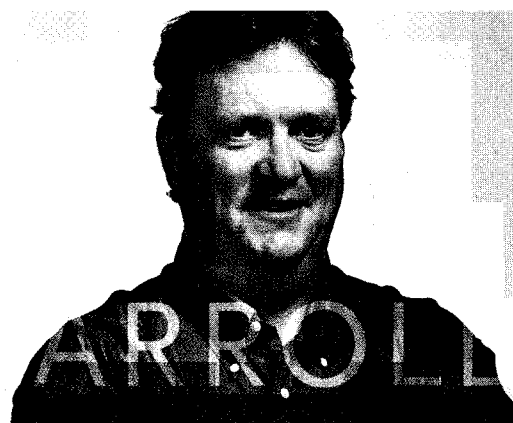


WIRELESS that *works*

Hidden in the hype are technologies that can make your business better – today



IF ONE HIGH-TECH INDUSTRY is guilty of over-hype, it's wireless. Everyone from tech giants to startups have told us we will do all our banking through wireless PDAs, and that Starbucks will beam a free latte coupon to your cellphone whenever you walk by one of its stores.

As if. I remember trying one of the early Internet cellphones and wondering why I might ever be so crazed as to order a book from Amazon.com through one – not to mention my concerns about allowing Starbucks to know where I am on the planet at any given moment.

But behind all the baffle-gab are some wireless wonders that can help you, now. Here's your executive guide to what's on offer – and what works.

★★★★★ **THE WIRELESS INTERNET.** Now that most cellular networks can handle data, you can link any laptop with a wireless modem into the Net from just about anywhere your cellphone works. One of the first services in Canada is Velocity Wireless from Telus (\$50 a month). For more compact wireless capability, you might want to check out Research In Motion's popular BlackBerry, which gives you "always-on" e-mail access, with Web access on some models.

With a bit of work, you can link your corporate applications to your wireless devices. Your salespeople could stand in a customer's warehouse and instantly record a sale in your order-entry system, reducing input costs and speeding up transactions.

The downside? Speeds are limited to 14.4Kbps – what most of us saw on the Net way back in 1994.

★★★★★ **BLUETOOTH.** Bluetooth is great – as a concept. It's a wireless protocol that lets devices such as cellphones and printers communicate over short distances. From a business perspective, it makes great sense – instant, easy connectivity.

But despite the impressive number of tech companies such as 3Com and IBM lined up behind the

technology, early Bluetooth-enabled products would only talk to other devices after a lot of fiddling. It's sort of like Soviet technology: designed by a committee, cumbersome and slow to get off the ground.

An official from the Bluetooth consortium recently admitted that the standard was at least eight years away from mass adoption. Owners of Bluetooth-enabled devices are on the bleeding edge and won't see a real return for some time.

★★★★★ **802.11b (a.k.a. Wi-Fi).** Basically, it's Ethernet without wires, developed to serve as a component of your local area network. The business case for 802.11b is straightforward – you save money by not having to wire your office. And your stockroom pickers can enter data directly into the corporate system faster and with fewer errors than by using paper forms.

Wi-Fi supports speeds of 11Mbps, fast enough to run a network, vs. a paltry 720Kbps for Bluetooth, which is designed to link together two devices at a time. Rapid marketplace acceptance is giving Wi-Fi lots of momentum. Look for publicly accessible Wi-Fi services in places such as Chicago's O'Hare Airport, where for a few dollars you can link your laptop to the Internet at speeds that put cellphones to shame. Getting Wi-Fi'd is easy: Wireless-networking cards cost about \$150, while "access points" – to link together all your wireless traffic – go for about \$500 to \$800.

Bottom line? There are really useful business applications for wireless today. But make sure you understand the limitations and benefits of each technology before you leap. **P**

Jim Carroll, FCA, is a speaker and author of 32 books, including Get a (Digital) Life: An Internet Reality Check. You can find him at www.jimcarroll.com or e-mail him at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com.

THE LONG VIEW

3G, or "Third Generation", is the Holy Grail of wireless – an international standard promising speeds up to 2Mbps over long distances. It's the technology behind those ads where someone video-conferences over their cellphone.

It's too early to make a call on 3G. The problem: Most implementations have been dramatically scaled back since the telecom meltdown. Many telcos are settling for "2.5G", which will deliver speeds up to 56Kb, only four times faster than today's wireless Internet.